"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, Room 1201, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

ber 32 May 1938

AMERICAN COUNTRY LIFE IN 1908

Excerpts from the Report of the Country Life Commission *

HOLBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

EXTRACTS FROM THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S LETTER TO

LIBERTY HYDE BAILEY SETTING UP THE COMMISSION**

"No nation has ever achieved permanent greatness unless this greatness was based on the well-being of the great farmer class, the men who live on the soil; for it is upon their welfare, material and moral, that the welfare of the rest of the nation ultimately rests....

"I doubt if any other nation can bear comparison with our own in the amount of attention given by the government, both federal and state, to agricultural matters. But practically the whole of this effort has hitherto been directed toward increasing the production of crops. Our attention has been concentrated almost exclusively on getting better farming. In the beginning this was unquestionably the right thing to do. The farmer must first of all grow good crops in order to support himself and his family. But when this has been secured, the effort for better farming should cease to stand alone, and should be accompanied by the effort for better business and better living on the farm. It is at least as important that the farmer should get the largest possible return in money, comfort, and social advantages from the crops he grows, as that he should get the largest possible return in crops from the land he farms. Agriculture is not the whole of country life. The great rural interests are human interests, and good crops are of little value to the farmer unless they open the door to a good kind of life on the farm.

"This problem of country life is in the truest sense a national problem. In an address delivered at the Semi-Centennial of the Founding of Agricultural Colleges in the United States a year ago last May, I said:

> 'There is but one person whose welfare is as vital to the welfare of the whole country as is that of the wageworker who does manual labor; and that is the tiller of the soil--the farmer. If there is one lesson

*Appointed by Theodore Roosevelt in 1908

**This letter was written at Oyster Bay, New York, August 10, 1908 to Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey, Director of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University. In it he asked Director Bailey to become chairman of a Commission on Country Life. The other members of the Commission were: Mr. Henry Wallace, Dr. Kenyon L. Butterfield, Mr. Gifford Pinchot, Mr. Walter H. Page, Mr. Charles S. Barrett and Mr. William A. Beard. The Commission reported to the President in 1909.

***This material was taken from the printed Report of the Commission on Country Life, published by Sturgis and Walton Company, New York, 1911. The book is now out of print.

taught by history, it is that the permanent greatness of any state must ultimately depend more upon the character of its country population than upon anything else. No growth of cities, no growth of wealth, can make up for loss in either the number or the character of the farming population....

'The farm grows the raw material for the food and clothing of all our citizens; it supports directly almost half of them; and nearly half the children of the United States are born and brought up on the farms. How can the life of the farm family be made less solitary, fuller of opportunity, freer from drudgery, more comfortable, happier, and more attractive? Such a result is most earnestly to be desired. How can life on the farm be kept on the highest level, and where it is not already on that level, be so improved, dignified and brightened as to awaken and keep alive the pride and loyalty of the farmer's boys and girls, of the farmer's wife, and of the farmer himself? How can a compelling desire to live on the farm be aroused in the children that are born on the farm? All these questions are of vital importance not only to the farmer, but to the whole nation....

'We hope ultimately to double the average yield of wheat and corn per acre; it will be a great achievement; but it is even more important to double the desirability, comfort, and standing of the farmer's life.'

"It is especially important that whatever will serve to prepare country children for life on the farm, and whatever will brighten home life in the country and make it richer and more attractive for the mothers, wives and daughters of farmers should be done promptly, thoroughly and gladly. There is no more important person, measured in influence upon the life of the nation, than the farmer's wife, no more important home than the country home, and it is of national importance to do the best we can for both.

"The farmers have hitherto had less than their full share of public attention along lines of business and social life. There is too much belief among all our people that the prizes of life lie away from the farm. I am therefore anxious to bring before the people of the United States the question of securing better business and better living on the farm, whether by cooperation between farmers for buying, selling and borrowing; by promoting social advantages and opportunities in the country; or by any other legitimate means that will help to make country life more gainful, more attractive, and fuller of opportunities, pleasures and rewards for the men, women and children of the farms."

THE COMMISSION'S REPORT ON THE COUNTRY CHURCH

This Commission has no desire to give advice to the institutions of religion nor to attempt to dictate their policies. Yet any consideration of the problem of rural life that leaves out of account the function and the possibilities of the church, and of related institutions, would be grossly inadequate. This is not only because in the last analysis the country life problem is a moral problem, or that in the best development of the individual the great motives and results are religious and spiritual, but because from the pure sociological point of view the church is fundamentally a necessary institution in country life. In a peculiar way the church is intimately related to the agricultural industry. The work and the life of the farm are closely bound together, and the institutions of the country react on that life and on one another more intimately than they do in the city. This gives the rural church a position of peculiar difficulty and one of unequalled opportunity. The time has arrived when the church must take a larger leadership, both as an institution and through its pastors, in the social reorganization of rural life.

The great spiritual needs of the country community just at present are higher personal and community ideals. Rural people need to have an aspiration for the highest possible development of the community. There must be an ambition on the part of the people themselves constantly to progress in all of those things that make the community life wholesome, satisfying, educative and complete. There must be a desire to develop a permanent environment for the country boy and girl, of which they will become passionately fond. As a pure matter of education, the countryman must learn to love the country and to have an intellectual appreciation of it. More than this, the spiritual nature of the individual must be kept thoroughly alive. His personal ideals of conduct and ambition must be cultivated.

Of course the church has an indispensable function as a conservator of morals. But from the social point of view, it is to hold aloft the torch of personal and community idealism. It must be a leader in the attempt to idealize country life.

The country church doubtless faces special difficulties. As a rule it is a small field. The country people are conservative. Ordinarily the financial support is inadequate. Often there are too many churches in a given community. Sectarian ideas divide unduly and unfortunately. While there are many rural churches that are effective agents in the social evolution of their communities, it is true that as a whole the country church needs new direction and to assume new responsibilities. Few of the churches in the open country are provided with resident pastors. They are supplied mostly from the neighboring towns and by a representative of some single denomination. Sometimes the pulpit is supplied by pastors of different denominations in turn. Without a resident minister the church work is likely to be confined chiefly to services once a week. In many regions there is little personal visitation except in cases of sickness, death, marriage, christening or other special circumstance. The Sunday School is sometimes continued only during the months of settled weather. There are young people's organizations to some extent, but they are often inactive or irregular. The social activity of the real country church is likely to be limited to the short informal meetings before and after services and to suppers that are held for the purpose of raising funds. Most of the gatherings are designed for the church people themselves rather than for the community. The range of social influence is therefore generally restricted to the families particularly related to the special church organization, and there is likely to be no sense of social responsibility for the entire community.

In the rural villages there are generally several or a number of churches of different denominations, one or more of which are likely to be weak. The salaries range from $400 to $1,000. Among Protestants there is considerable denominational competition and consequent jealousy or even conflict. United effort for cooperative activity is likely to be perfunctory rather than sympathetic and vital. The pastor is often overloaded with station work in neighboring communities.

It is not the purpose of the Commission to discuss the difficulties of the rural church at this time, nor to present a solution for them, but, in the interests of rural betterment, it seems proper to indicate a few considerations that seem to be fundamental.

(1) In New England and in some other parts of the North, the tremendous drawback of denominational rivalry is fairly well recognized and active measures for church federation are well under way. This does not mean organic union. It means cooperation for the purpose of trying to reach and influence every individual in the community. It means that "some church is to be responsible for every square mile." When a community is over-churched, it means giving up the superfluous church or churches. When a church is needed, it means a friendly agreement on the

particular church to be placed there. This movement for federation is one of the most promising in the whole religious field, because it does not attempt to break down denominational influence or standards of thought. It puts emphasis, not on the church itself, but on the work to be done by the church for all men, churched and unchurched. It is possible that all parts of the country are not quite ready for federation, although a national church federation movement is under way. But it hardly seems necessary to urge that the spirit of cooperation among churches, the diminution of sectarian strife, the attempt to reach the entire community, must become the guiding principles everywhere if the rural church is long to retain its hold.

(2) The rural church must be more completely than now a social center. This means not so much a place for holding social gatherings, although this is legitimate and desirable, but a place whence constantly emanates influences that go to build up the moral and spiritual tone of the whole community. The country church of the future is to be held responsible for the great ideals of community life as well as of personal character.

(3) There should be a large extension of the work of the Young Men's Christian Association into the rural communities. There is apparently no other way to grip the hearts and lives of the boys and young men of the average country neighborhood. This association must regard itself as an ally of the church with a special function and a special field.

(4) We must have a complete conception of the country pastorate. The country pastor must be a community leader. He must know the rural problems. He must have sympathy with rural ideals and aspirations. He must love the country. He must know country life, the difficulties that the farmer has to face in his business, some of the great scientific revelations made in behalf of agriculture, the great industrial forces at work for the making or the unmaking of the farmer, the fundamental social problems of the life of the open country.

Consequently, the rural pastor must have special training for his work. Ministerial colleges and theological seminaries should unite with agricultural colleges in this preparation of the country clergyman. There should be better financial support for the clergyman; in many country districts it is pitiably small. There is little incentive for a man to stay in a country parish, and yet his residence is just what must come about. Perhaps it will require an appeal to the heroic young men, but we must have more men going into the country pastorates not as a means of getting a foothold but as a permanent work. The clergyman has an excellent chance for leadership in the country. In some sections he is still the dominating personality. But everywhere he may become one of the great community leaders. He is the key to the country church problem.

EXCERPTS FROM THE COMMISSION'S REPORT ON PERSONAL IDEALS AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP

"Everything resolves itself at the end into a question of personality. Society, or government, cannot do much for country life unless there is voluntary response in the personal ideals of those who live in the country.....

"It is often said that better rural institutions and more attractive homes and yards will necessarily follow an increase in profitableness of farming; but as a matter of fact, high ideals may be quite independent of income, although they can not be realized without sufficient income to provide good support. Many of the most thrifty farmers are the least concerned about the character of the home and school and church. One often finds the most attractive and useful farm homes in the difficult farming regions. On the other hand, some of the most prosperous agricultural regions possess most unattractive farm premises and school buildings."